

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 SSO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 NSCE-00
INR-05 INRE-00 ICAE-00 PA-01 PM-03 SP-02 TRSE-00
NSAE-00 L-01 /037 W
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O R 312050Z AUG 78
FM AMEMBASSY QUITO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9275
INFO AMEMBASSY CARACAS
AMEMBASSY LA PAZ
AMEMBASSY LIMA
AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO
USCINCSO
AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 QUITO 6118

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, EC
SUBJECT: FUTURE OF THE RETORNO PROCESS IN ECUADOR

SUMMARY: IN A PRIVATE CONVERSATION WITH PRESIDENT POVEDA
ON AUG. 30, HE DID NOT REACT TO THE REPORT OF A
CONSPIRACY TO NULLIFY THE FIRST ROUND OF THE PRESIDENTIAL
ELECTIONS AND STRONGLY DENIED ANY DESIRE OF THE ECUADOREAN
MILITARY TO REMAIN IN POWER OR TO FIND AN ALTERNATIVE WAY
OF SELECTING A CIVILIAN PRESIDENT. HOWEVER, IN THE EVENT
THE SUPREME ELECTORAL TRIBUNAL DECLARES THE ELECTION
INVALID AND THE GOE UPHOLDS THE FINDING, THERE ARE PLANS
TO CONVOKE NEW ELECTIONS AND ANNOUNCE A TENTATIVE TIMETABLE
TO ELECT AND INSTALL A NEW PRESIDENT WITH A MINIMUM DELAY
(PERHAPS TWO OR THREE MONTHS BEYOND THE ORIGINAL SCHEDULE).

1. AT MY REQUEST I HAD A LONG MEETING LAST NIGHT WITH
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PRESIDENT POVEDA TO DISCUSS THE PRESENT PARLOUS STATE
OF THE RETORNO PROCESS. WE MET AT HIS PRIVATE RESIDENCE
WITH NO ONE ELSE PRESENT AND WITHOUT INTERRUPTIONS IN AN
ATMOSPHERE CONDUCIVE TO OPENNESS. I TOLD THE ADMIRAL
THAT MY PREDECESSORS OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS HAD FELT
FREE TO DISCUSS THE RETORNO PROCESS WITH HIM IN TOTAL
FRANKNESS AND THAT I HOPED I COULD ALSO TALK WITH HIM IN

THE SAME SPIRIT OF CANDOR AND FRIENDSHIP.

2. I REITERATED THE GREAT INTEREST OF THE USG IN THE RETORNO PROCESS AS DEMONSTRATED BY PRESIDENT CARTER'S CONVERSATIONS AND LETTERS. I EMPHASIZED THE VALUE OF RETORNO AS KEY TO THE IMPROVEMENT IN OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS. I ALSO MADE CLEAR THAT OUR INTEREST IN THE RETORNO PROCESS WAS WELL KNOWN BUT THAT SOME WERE MALICIOUSLY MISINTERPRETING THIS AS SUPPORT FOR A PARTICULAR CANDIDATE. I ASSURED THE PRESIDENT THAT WE DID NOT AND COULD NOT HAVE A FAVORED CANDIDATE AND HE ACKNOWLEDGED THIS. I THEN RECALLED HIS CONVERSATIONS IN BOGOTA WITH ASSISTANT SECRETARY VAKY AND SAID HE GAVE A VERY FAVORABLE IMPRESSION OF THE MILITARY'S DESIRE TO HAND POWER OVER TO A CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT AND ITS DETERMINATION NOT TO DEVIATE FROM THE PLAN. I REMARKED THAT HIS WIDELY-REPORTED STATEMENTS TO THE PRESS IN BOGOTA AND HIS AUGUST 10TH INDEPENDENCE DAY SPEECH HAD UNDERScoreD THIS DETERMINATION.

3. HOWEVER, ONLY A FEW DAYS AFTER THE BOGOTA MEETINGS, WE BEGAN RECEIVING DISQUIETING INFORMATION ABOUT PLANS TO DISCREDIT THE JULY 16 ELECTION WITH THE APPARENT INTENTION OF ANNULING IT AND EITHER PROLONGING MILITARY RULE OR FINDING AN ALTERNATIVE MEANS OF SELECTING A PRE IDENT. I REFERRED SPECIFICALLY TO OUR KNOWLEDGE OF
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A CONSPIRACY WITHIN AND OUT OF THE GOVERNMENT WHEREBY THE TECHNICAL IRREGULARITIES AND ALLEGATIONS OF FRAUD WOULD BE EXAGGERATED AND MANIPULATED IN SUCH A WAY AS TO CREATE CONFUSION AND CAUSE ONE OR MORE OF THE CANDIDATES TO RESIGN AND PERHAPS THE SUPREME ELECTORAL TRIBUNAL (SET) AS WELL. I NOTED THAT THE NULLIFICATION SO FAR OF A CONSIDERABLE NUMBER OF VOTES IN VARIOUS PROVINCES, THE TRIAL OF THE PICHINCHA PROVINCIAL ELECTORAL TIRBUNAL BY THE SET, AND THE CHARGES OF WIDESPREAD FRAUD IN GUAYAS (WHERE THE RECOUNT HAD JUST COMMENCED) SEEMED TO BEAR OUT THE ALLEGED SCENARIO WHICH SUPPOSEDLY WOULD INVALIDATE THE FIRST ROUND. GIVEN THE PRESIDENT'S STRONG COMMITMENT TO THE RETORNO PROCESS I ASKED FOR HIS COMMENTS ON THIS ANALYSIS.

4. THE PRESIDENT EXPRESSED APPRECIATION FOR USG CONCERN OVER THE SITUATION AND OUTLINED IN CONSIDERABLE DETAIL THE BACKGROUND OF HOW THE RETORNO PLAN WAS FORMULATED. HE SAID THE GOE'S PLAN HAD DRAWN ON OUTSIDE EXPERIENCE AND ALSO INCLUDED ITS OWN PRINCIPLES DEVELOPED FROM AN ASSESSMENT OF ITS OWN POLITICAL REALITIES AND NEEDS. HE DENIED THAT MILITARY WANTED A

SIMPLE "SALIDA" OR OLD FORMULAE SUCH AS A CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY WHICH HE SAID WOULD NOT HAVE REPRESENTED ANY PROGRESS IN ECUADOREAN POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT. POVEDA SAID THE GOE'S RETORNO PLAN CULMINATED WITH THE JANUARY REFERENDUM IN WHICH THE ELECTORATE VOTED ON A NEW CONSTITUTION AND WHICH HE CHARACTERIZED AN EXTRA-ORDINARY SUCCESS AND FOR WHICH HE CLAIMED CREDIT FOR THE GOE. HE SAID THE NEW CONSTITUTION AND THE ELECTORAL LAWS ARE THE MAIN BULWARKS AGAINST GOING BACK ON THE RETORNO PROCESS. ANY ATTEMPT TO DO SO WOULD BE AN ABSURDITY, HE SAID. POVEDA ADMITTED THAT A NEW AND UNTRIED PLAN WAS BOUND TO HAVE PROBLEMS RANGING FROM DIFFICULTIES TO BLOODSHED. FORTUNATELY, UP UNTIL NOW ALL THEY HAD WERE DIFFICULTIES.

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5. POVEDA ABSOLVED THE GOE FROM THE PROBLEMS ARISING FROM THE JULY 16 ELECTION, STATING THE VOTERS WERE

RELATIVELY UNINFORMED, THE PARTIES WERE NOT WELL ORGANIZED (MORE SO IN THE CASE OF THE CFP), AND INEXPERIENCED IN THAT THERE HAD BEEN NO ELECTIONS IN TEN YEARS. MOREOVER, THE ELECTIONS WERE BEING GOVERNED BY NEW AND UNTESTED ELECTORAL LAWS. HE SAID THE GOE HAD HURRIEDLY ANNOUNCED UNOFFICIAL TOTALS WITHOUT WORRYING INITIALLY ABOUT DISCREPANCIES IN TOTALS. TURNING TO THE PRESENT SITUATION, THE PRESIDENT SAID THE SET WAS INVESTIGATING THE IRREGULARITIES AND CHARGES OF FRAUD. AGAIN DISCLAIMING ANY GOVERNMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY, POVEDA SAID THE SET WOULD JUDGE WHETHER THE FIRST ROUND RESULTS WERE IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE LAW AND THEREFORE VALID AND IF OTHERWISE, INVALID. IN THE LATTER CASE, THE MATTER WOULD BE BROUGHT BEFORE THE SUPREME COUNCIL. IF THE SET'S FINDINGS WERE NOT BASED ON DEMONSTRABLE

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EVIDENCE OF IRREGULARITIES AND/OR FRAUD, HE WOULD APPOINT A NEW SET TO CARRY ON.

6. HOWEVER, IF THE INVALIDITY WERE SUBSTANTIATED, HE WOULD DELIVER A MESSAGE TO THE PEOPLE OUTLINING THE REASONS FOR NULLIFYING THE JULY 16 ELECTION. AT THE SAME TIME HE WOULD ANNOUNCE A DATE FOR NEW ELECTIONS PROBABLY NO MORE THAN FOUR OR FIVE MONTHS LATER. THIS PREPARATORY PERIOD WOULD BE USED TO CORRECT DEFICIENCIES IN THE VOTING PROCEDURES. A DEFINITE SCHEDULE FOR THE ENTIRE PROCESS WOULD BE SET FORTH ALLOWING 60 DAYS FOR THE VOTE SCRUTINIES (WHICH HE SAID COULD NOT BE SHORTENED) AND FOR THE SECOND ROUND (STILL REQUIRED UNDER THE LAW). WHILE DISCLAIMING FOREKNOWLEDGE OF WHAT THE SET WILL FIND, POVEDA SAID THAT SCHEDULING NEW ELECTIONS MIGHT MEAN A DELAY IN TURNING POWER OVER TO A CIVILIAN PRESIDENT OF ABOUT TWO MONTHS FROM THE PRESENTLY ESTIMATED DATE OF JANUARY 11, 1979, IF THE PROCESS IS NOT INTERRUPTED.

6. POVEDA EMPHATICALLY ASSERTED HE WOULD HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH PRETEXTS TO PROLONG MILITARY RULE OR TO CHANGE THE MAIN ELEMENTS OF THE PLAN. AND HE CLAIMED TO HAVE THE BACKING OF THE ARMED FORCES IN THIS.

7. COMMENT: THE PRESIDENT DID NOT REACT TO MY MENTION OF A CONSPIRACY AND MADE NO ATTEMPT TO PRESS FOR DETAILS OR NAMES. HE HARDLY MENTIONED THE CANDIDATES AT ALL, MAINTAINING THE GOVERNMENT IS INTERESTED PRINCIPALLY IN THE INTEGRITY OF PROCESS AND NOT IN THE FATE OF ANY PARTICULAR CANDIDATE OR PARTY. HE DID SPECULATE THAT IN A NEW ELECTION THE ROLDOS-HURTADO TICKET WOULD SURELY COMPETE BECAUSE OF THEIR INITIAL SUCCESS. HE SAID

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DURAN-BALLEN WOULD BE THE MOST AFFECTED AND COULD DROP OUT. HE ALSO SAID SOME CHANGES IN RUNNING MATES MIGHT OCCUR.

8. WHILE THE PRESIDENT WAS CAREFUL TO POSIT HIS TALK ABOUT NEW ELECTIONS ON THE SUPPOSITION THAT THE SET MIGHT RULE THE JULY 16 ELECTION INVALID, HIS FAIRLY DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF NEXT STEPS AND HIS TENTATIVE TIMETABLE LEADS ME TO BELIEVE THAT HE EXPECTS THE WORSE AND MAY EVEN ALREADY BE PERSUADED THAT NEW ELECTIONS ARE THE ONLY WAY TO PRESERVE WHAT HE PERCEIVES TO BE THE ESSENCE OF THE RETORNO PROCESS.
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